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(b)(3):10 USC 424



Defense Intelligence Assessment

January 1998

DI-1584-4-98

A Critical Analysis of Colombia's Counterinsurgency (U)

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Defense Intelligence Assessment

A Critical Analysis of Colombia's Counterinsurgency (U)

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A Critical Analysis of Colombia's Counterinsurgency (U)

Foreword

(S)

(b)(1),1.4 (b),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(U) In general, counterinsurgency doctrines have three tenets: the center of gravity of any counterinsurgency is the people, the state must take the cause (the basis of animus against the state) away from the insurgents, and the state must isolate the insurgents from their population support base. Based on these tenets, proven counterinsurgency strategies can be reduced to three broad categories: a military strategy (kill the insurgents); a civil-military strategy that includes humanitarian-civic action programs and psychological operations (win the loyalty of the people); and population control measures that include civil defense, contraband, and population movement controls (isolate the insurgents).

(U) The synergy of these three approaches should lead to victory (those political, operational, and tactical successes whose ends ultimately bring peace). It is from this framework that Colombia's counterinsurgency efforts will be analyzed.

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Figure 1. (U) Colombia.

A Critical Analysis of Colombia's Counterinsurgency (U)

The Insurgency — Foundations

(U) Colombia has had a long history of sectarian, multiclass, two-party politics and intense factionalism within those parties. Factionalism operates through a powerful, personalistic patronage system centered around the cliques of those in office that ultimately affects thousands of jobs in and out of the civil bureaucracy. This has led to traditionally weak central governments and civil institutions and is a principal cause of the government's historically limited ability to extend its authority throughout the country.

(U) The two major parties (Liberal and Conservative) established a power-sharing representation system in 1958 to end almost 20 years of interparty conflict. During the period known as La Violencia, almost 200,000 Colombians — mostly peasants — died. The system known as the National Front required mandatory rotation of the presidency between the parties. With each party changeover, entire national, departmental, and local bureaucracies — from police to office cleaners — changed too. The roots of this insurgency lay in the political immobility of the National Front experiment, which continued until 1974.

(U) The Andean region of Colombia — along with the developing Caribbean coast — is the political and economic core of the state, with 70 percent of the population. This is where the national government has traditionally focused its attention, unwilling or unable to administer large parts of the countryside outside the areas of concentrated wealth, natural resources, and people.

(U) The struggle that besets this country is between two conceptions and two realities of Colombia — that of the political, economic, and urban dwelling elites and that of the peasants in the rural periphery. In many ways, Colombia's conflict is a bloody process of polit-

ical consolidation and incorporation that other Latin American states have already endured and resolved.

The Threat — Indigenous and Politically Marginalized

(U) Colombians have exercised the democratic franchise as much by the gun as by the vote. Characteristically, the ongoing insurgency is as much an outgrowth of the political culture and social geography of Colombia as it is a shadow of the Cold War.

"All Politics Is Local"

(U) Although the original FARC manifesto issued in 1966 discussed revolutionary goals within a Cold War Marxist context and guerrilla warfare activities in general, one of the early guerrilla bands from El Pato published an open letter calling for the following (among others):

- Withdrawal of military forces from rural areas.
- Restitution of lands and indemnification for victims of political violence.
- Free land for those who would work it.
- Increase in public health expenditures.

(U) These more pragmatic, parochial, and less revolutionary demands add an ambiguous dimension to FARC goals. Of note, they are consistent with those recently offered by FARC spokesmen as conditions for peace talks with the government of Ernesto Samper.

(S) The largest insurgent group and the one with the oldest lineage is the FARC, which drew its initial leaders and followers from disparate political bands and criminal groups (b)(1), 1.4 (b), 1.4 (c) For-
mally organized in 1966, the FARC now operates

throughout Colombia.

(b)(1),1.4 (b),1.4 (c)

(U) The ELN was formed on 4 July 1964 from radical students on scholarship in Cuba. Initially following a Che Guevara strategy of shock and collapse of the political order, the ELN's early social heterogeneity (intellectual, middle class, and peasant) led to a rocky and disorganized start. Some early student radical founders were shot, others defected, while new liberation theology leaders emerged. The ELN has traditionally espoused nationalization of industries and mineral sectors and redistribution of wealth and land. They continue to fight against perceived multinational corporate exploitation of Colombian natural resources. The ELN's main operating areas are in the central and northeastern Andean region.

(U) After several failed efforts to negotiate truces in the mid-1980s, only two other guerrilla groups have demobilized: the Maoist Popular Liberation Army (EPL) and the 19th of April Movement—except, in the case of the latter, for a small dissident faction known as the EPL-D. Throughout its political history, Colombia has used truces or amnesties to demobilize armed factions.

A Self-Sufficient Insurgency

(S) Despite the end of the Cold War, the repudiation of communist doctrines around the globe, and the drying up of external support for wars of national liberation, Colombia's insurgents not only survive but prosper. They survive because of deep indigenous roots in areas where, in many cases, there has never been a national presence. They prosper because of the illicit drug-trafficking economy in their areas of operation and control that moves an estimated \$2.5 billion annually—20 percent of total legal exports, between the value of coffee and oil exports, according to one Colombian think tank.¹

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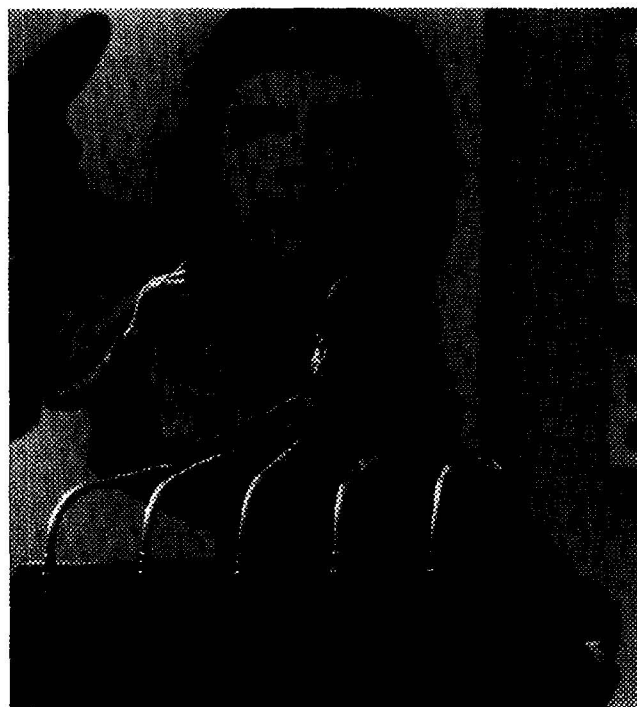


Figure 2. (U) Castro and Che Guevara, Revolutionary Icons of the ELN.

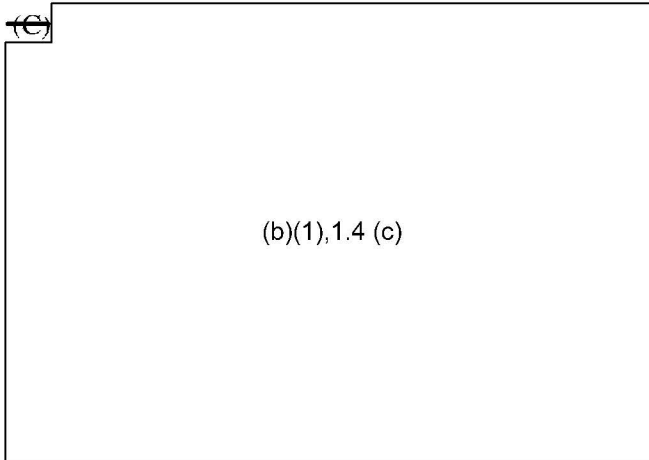
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(b)(1),1.4 (b),1.4 (c)

¹ (U) This study refers to the total value of the drug economy in Colombia versus estimates of the insurgent share discussed in the tonebox.

The Goals of the Insurgency — Three Hypotheses

A Reordered Society



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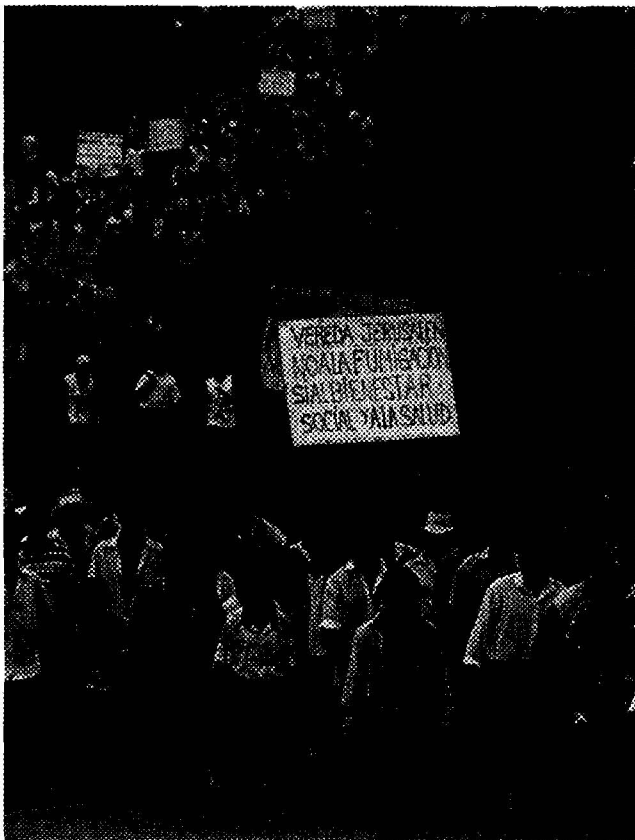
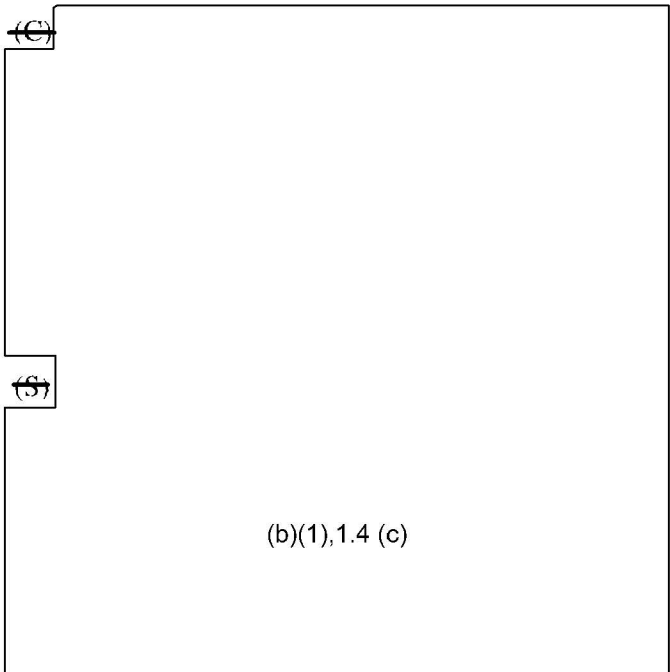


Figure 3. (U) Thousands of Coca Farmers Protest in Orito, Colombia, in August 1996. The farmers were demanding the decriminalization of cocaine cultivation. The sign reads "No to fumigation, yes to social welfare and health"

Revolutionary Ascendancy to Local Power



Criminal Warlords



Insurgent Objectives — Ambiguous

(U) Insurgencies are often ambiguous, even contradictory in their objectives, "apart from obtaining power." Tactics and exploitation of opportunity play important roles in insurgent strategy, and make it difficult to fix the true goals of the insurgent.

"The importance of a cause, an absolute essential at the outset of an insurgency, decreases progressively as the insurgent acquires strength. The war itself becomes the principal issue . . ."

—David Galula in *Counterinsurgency Warfare*

The Current Situation

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(b)(1),1.4 (c)

(b)(1),1.4 (c)

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(b)(1),1.4 (c)

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(b)(1),1.4 (c)

Regional Stability

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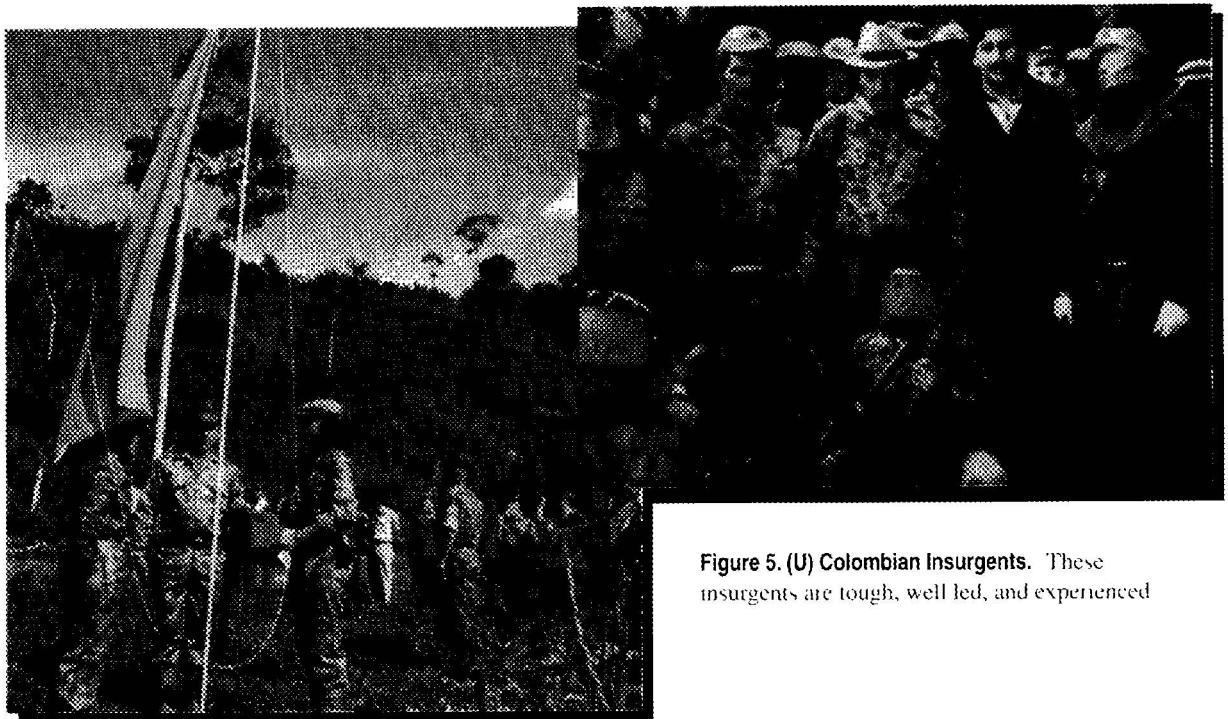


Figure 5. (U) Colombian Insurgents. These insurgents are tough, well led, and experienced

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Figure 6. (S)

(b)(1),1.4 (c)



(b)(1),1.4 (c)

(b)(1),1.4 (c)

Unity of Effort — Insurgent Operations

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(b)(1),1.4 (c)

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(b)(1),1.4 (c)

(b)(1),1.4 (c)

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(b)(1),1.4 (c)

(b)(1),1.4 (c)

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(b)(1),1.4 (c)

Current Operational Objectives

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(b)(1),1.4 (c)

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Figure 7. (S)

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(b)(1),1.4 (c)

FARC — Not Against Elections

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(b)(1),1.4 (c)

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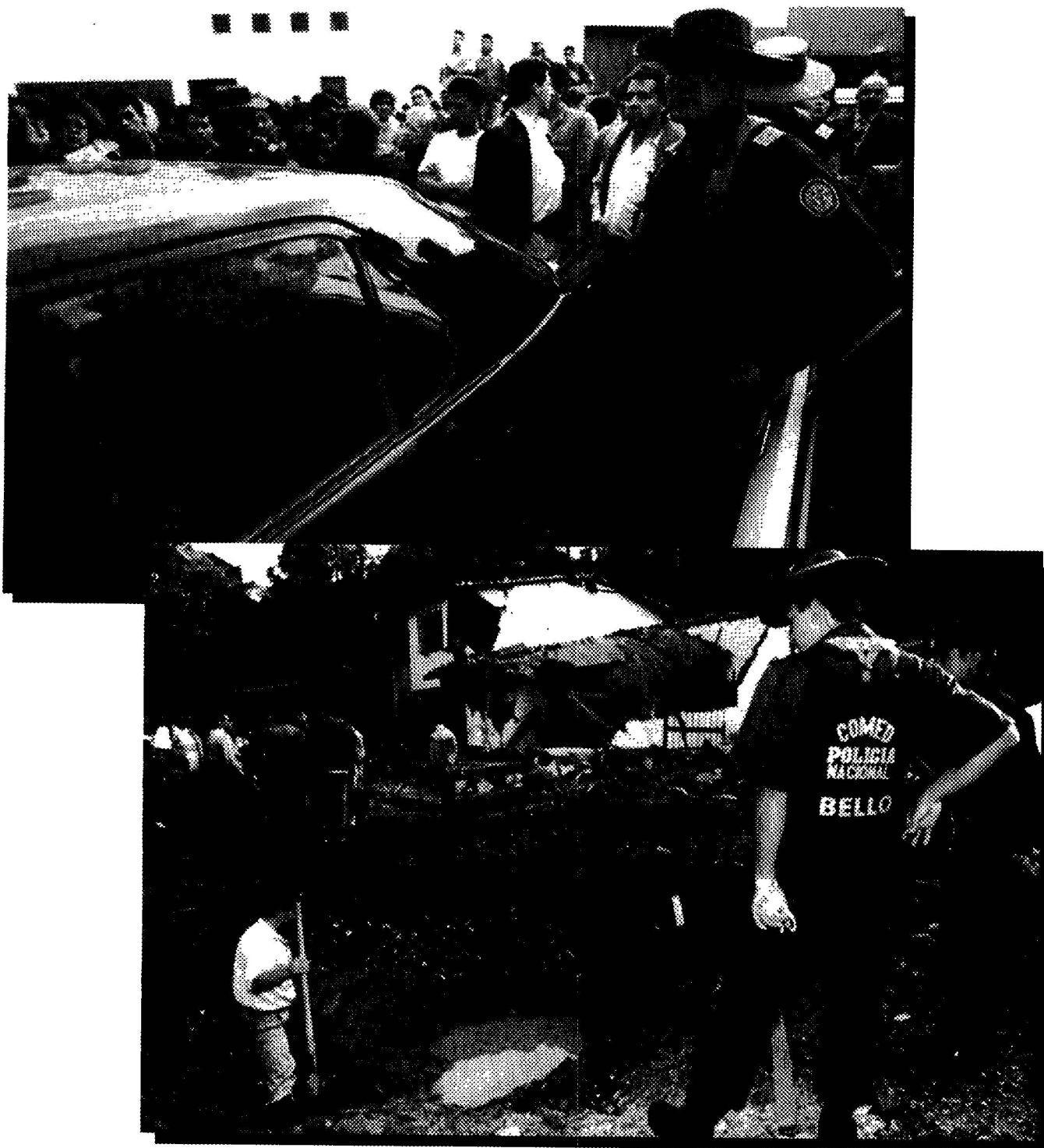


Figure 8. (S)

(b)(1), 1.4 (c)

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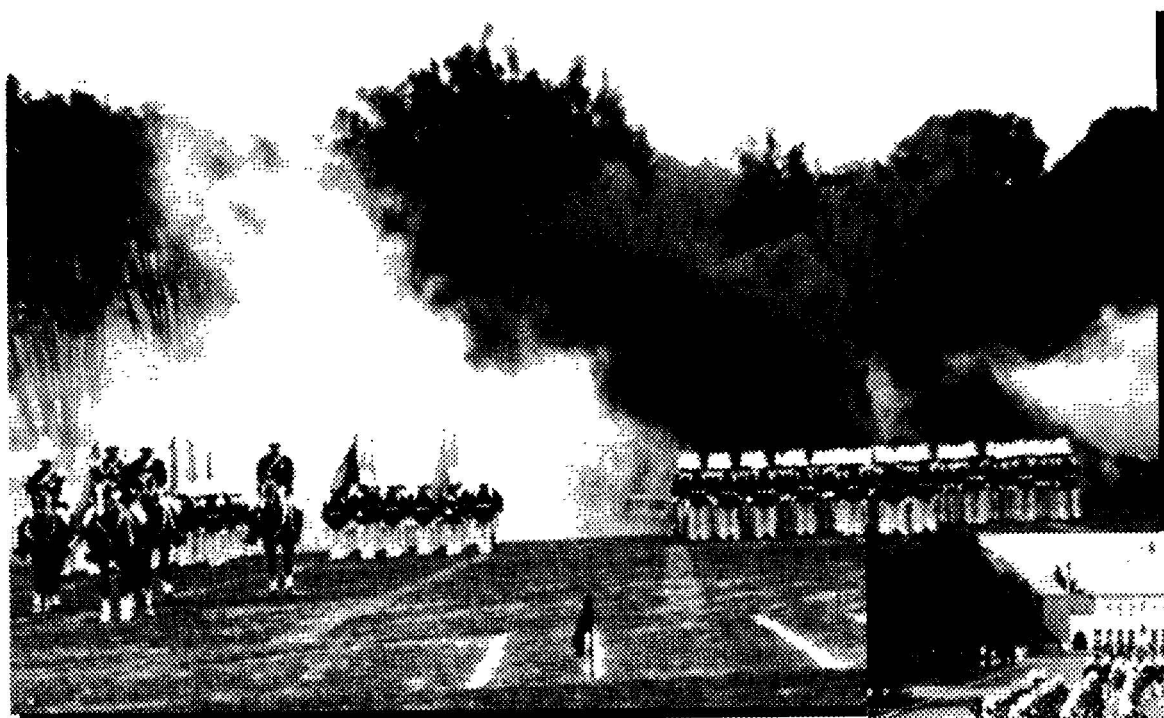


Figure 9. (S)

(b)(1),1.4 (c)



PLAN LASO and the Origins of Colombia's Counterinsurgency Doctrine

(S) The continuing violence following the formation of the National Front in 1958 caused many military intellectuals to assess the sociological conditions in Colombia. Several were convinced that the deprivation and exploitation of Colombian peasants were the root causes of banditry and rebellion, while the traditional use of guerrillas to further partisan political struggles provided a ready pool of fighters awaiting only indoctrination.

(b)(1),1.4 (c)

(S)

(b)(1),1.4 (c)

This plan contained the seeds of a sound counterinsurgency strategy by combining civic action programs with (b)(1),1.4 (c)

This developmentalist approach sought, in effect, to steal the insurgents' cause.

(S)

(b)(1),1.4 (c)

(b)(1), 1.4 (c)

pletely defeated,

1.4 (b), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

(S) Colombia's early counterinsurgency strategy had the elements of success. PLAN LASO expanded the COLAR public relations and psychological warfare units and employed the armed forces in many civic action programs. The political and social realities of Colombia, however, overmatched the ambitious scope of this plan. Moreover, Colombia's counterinsurgency doctrine predates the formation of any Marxist guerrilla movements there. This argues that both the insurgency and counterinsurgency are primarily phenomena of intrinsic national character and less a relic of the Cold War. This also explains why the conflict continues unabated.

(S)

(b)(1), 1.4 (b), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

National Will and the Commander in Chief

(S) In 40 years, the insurgents have not been com-

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Figure 10. (S)

(b)(1), 1.4 (b), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

² (U) Defense spending includes all money expended, not just appropriated, for defense. It also includes police or other paramilitary service budgets if organized under the national defense establishment (as is the national police in Colombia).

The Dilemma of Insurgency

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(U) Colombian
President Ernesto
Samper.

(U) "In some countries, the main challenge is fighting the mafias of drugs or terror; in others, the main priority is safeguarding the borders; some armies must give special attention to protecting the streets. In Colombia, our police and armed forces must do everything at the same time: pursue drug traffickers, fight guerrillas and self-defense groups, release citizens kidnaped by criminals, and maintain peace at our borders."

—President Ernesto Samper, September 1996

(U) "The insurgent is fluid because he has neither responsibility nor concrete assets; the counterinsurgent is rigid because he has both, and no amount of wailing can alter this fact . . ."

—David Galula in *Counterinsurgency Warfare*

(S)

(b)(1),1.4 (b),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S)

(b)(1),1.4 (b),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(b)(1),1.4 (b),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

A Deteriorating Future?

(U) A coherent counterinsurgency strategy should flow from the political objectives of the government. Appropriately, from a civil-military context, the

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d) Since the objective in revolutionary war is people and not terrain, political policy is an active instrument of operations; thus the importance of nationally coordinated and regionally executed civil-military operations and population control measures.

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

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Figure 11. (S)

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(U) This section assesses the Colombian military, principally its ground forces, in its recent efforts to defeat this 40-year insurgency. It assesses the war from two vantages—the ground forces' preparations

for war and the execution of the war proper. Also evaluated is COLAR performance through the three levels of war—strategic, operational, and tactical.

(S) The COLAR is a professional force in the classic sense in that it has organization, chain of command, uniforms, a professional code, self-identity, and a professional military education system.

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

Preparation for War

The Colombian Soldier

(S) The Colombian Army is a conscript army. Soldiers drafted from throughout the country serve 18 months. Most have elementary-level education. High school graduates are known as "bachilleres." They serve for 1 year only and are not assigned to combat or high-risk duties. Upon completion of their service, "bachilleres" are offered preferential entry to one of Colombia's universities, and those from wealthier families usually leave to study in the United States.

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

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Figure 12. (S)

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S) COLAR divisions and subordinate brigades operate in specified geographic areas and do not normally move. Once drafted, the Colombian soldier reports to his assigned battalion, usually near his hometown, meaning that most soldiers will operate in the part of the country from which they came.

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S) The COLAR does not have a centralized basic training system. Soldiers report to their designated battalions and initially are assigned to a basic training company for their first 6 or 8 weeks. Although basic training plans are centrally developed and standardized, basic training in the COLAR is decentrally executed.

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

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(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

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(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S) Marine forces serve 24-36 months, and all attend a grueling 12-week basic training course, followed by platoon refresher courses after 6-12 months in the field.

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

Leader Development

(S) Professional and progressive military education exists for Army officers and NCOs.

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S)

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S) NCOs attend a total of 18 months of formal training that is a combination of basic NCO and advanced infantry training.

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Training Is Key to Success

(S)

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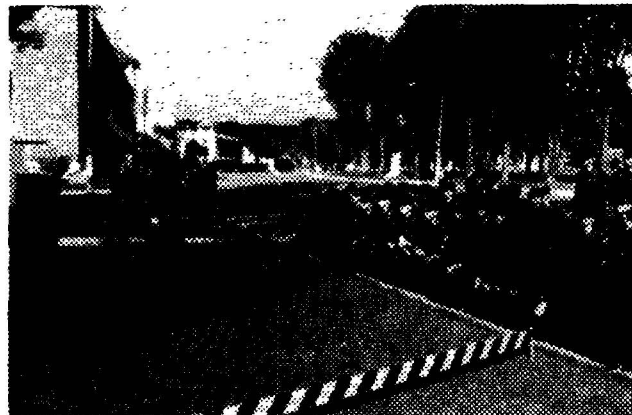
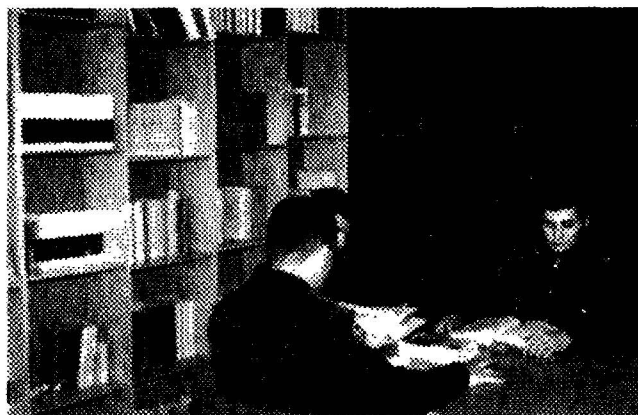


Figure 13. (S)

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(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

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Figure 14. (S) (b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

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(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S)

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S)

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

**“Move, Shoot, and Communicate” —
Fundamental Shortcomings**

(S)

Move: Mobility Problems

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(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S)

(S) FAC pilots are highly skilled and have many flight hours, and they typically operate in direct support of the Army.

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Figure 16. (S)

(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

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(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

Army Aviation Challenges

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(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

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Shoot: Weapons and Training Problems

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(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

(S)

(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

War Execution

Strategy and Objectives — Undefined

(S) Doctrinally, military operations should be directed toward a clearly defined, decisive, and attainable objective.

(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

Communicate: Limited Organic Capability

(S)

(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

Dead Men Walking

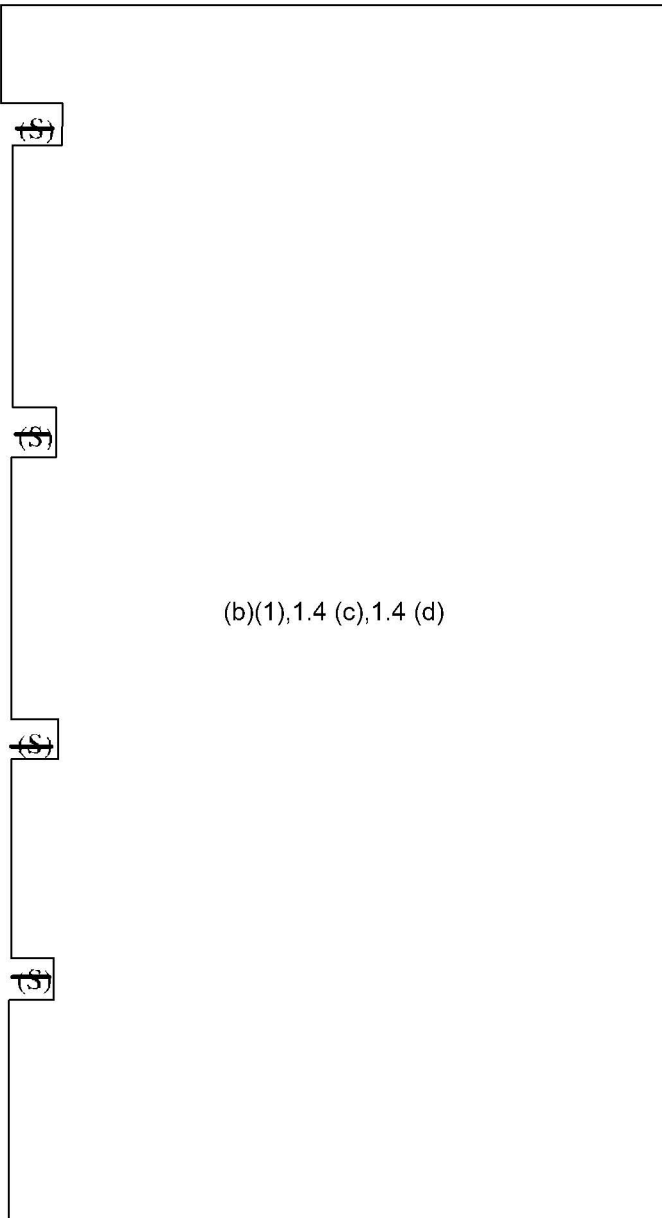
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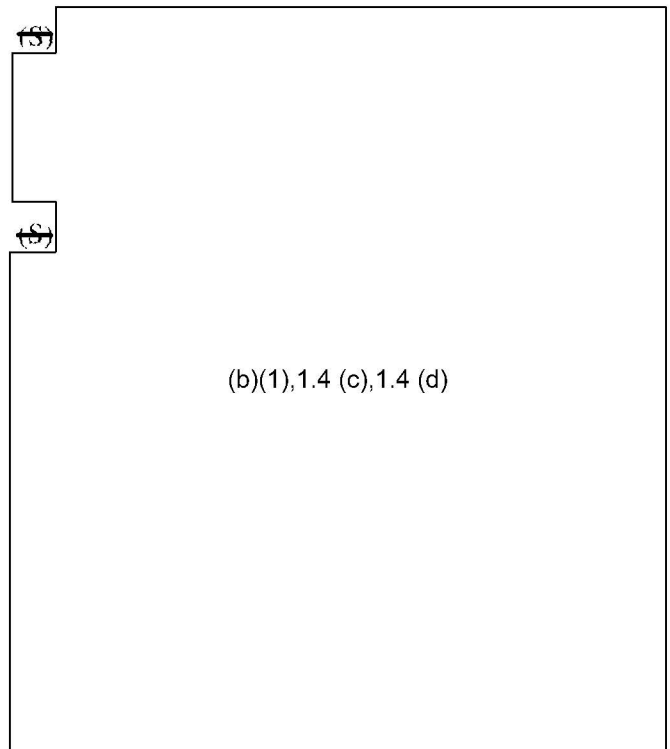
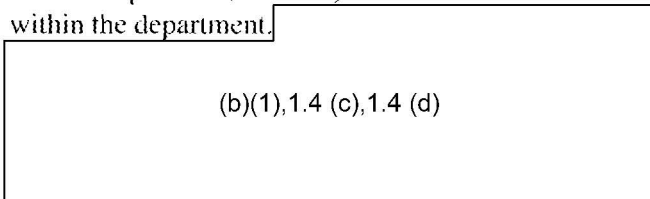
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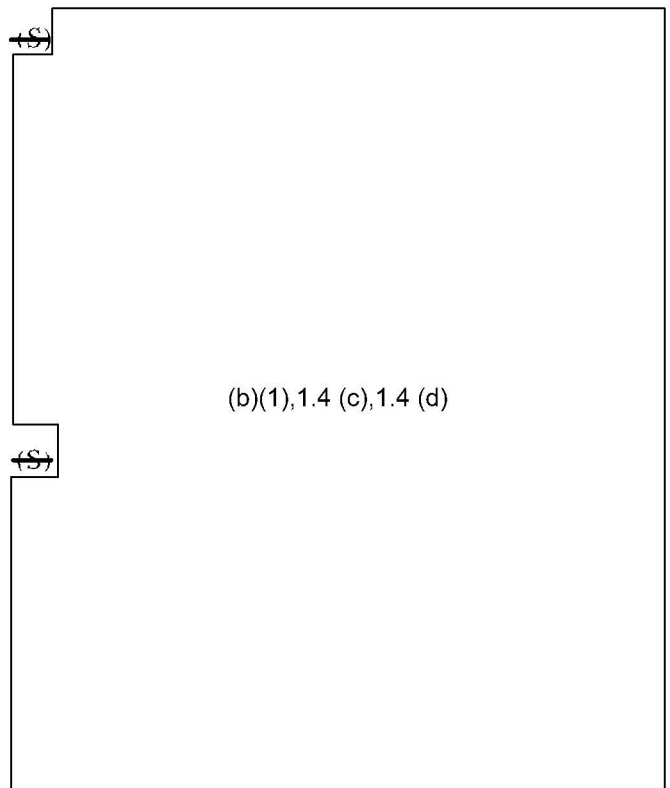


Problems of Mass

~~(S)~~ Divisional and brigade boundaries correspond generally to groupings of political departments (states), while brigade units are assigned to one or more of these departments depending on the size and number of municipalities (counties) and urban areas located within the department.



Campaigns and Major Operations: Deficiencies in Counterinsurgency Planning and Execution



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(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

Unity of Effort — Joint Operations in Name Only

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(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

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(S)

Tactical Weakness — Poor Integration of Battlefield Operating Systems

(S) Battlefield operating systems are a means to structure and evaluate operations. When integrated and synchronized, these systems help maximize combat effectiveness.

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

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(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

On the Horizon — The Culminating Point?

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(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

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(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

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Figure 18. (S)

(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

